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June 20, 2012

### **Underpaid and Restless: Study Presents a 'Dismal Picture' of Life as a Part-Time Professor**

*By Dan Berrett*

Part-time faculty members work for low pay and scant benefits relative to their level of education and training, according to a [long-awaited study](#), released today, of this fast-growing sector of the academic work force.

The median pay, \$2,700 per course, and limited access to health insurance "stand in stark contradiction to higher education's claims about the value—including the economic value"—of higher education, write the authors of "A Portrait of Part-Time Faculty Members." The study was conducted by the Coalition on the Academic Workforce, a group of 26 higher-education associations, disciplinary societies, and faculty organizations.

The researchers based their findings on the responses of nearly 20,000 contingent, or non-tenure-track, faculty members, of whom about 10,000 worked part time. They answered a 160-question survey made available online from late September 2010 until late November of the same year. The contingent academic work force represents approximately 70 percent of the faculty.

The findings do not purport to be statistically representative, though they encompass a range of disciplines, geographic areas in the United States, and types of institutions, including two- and four-year, and for-profit and nonprofit colleges. Despite their limitations, the data offer important insights, the authors write, into the working lives of part-time and contingent faculty.

These insights are likely to be cited as support for a growing litany of grievances on the status of contingent faculty. They coincide with emerging data from other sources, while also adding substance to accusations that the edifice of higher education is increasingly being maintained on the backs of an academic underclass.

Nearly three-quarters of the respondents described their part-time teaching positions as their primary occupation, and the income from them as essential or very important. Two-thirds of the part-time respondents, however, earned an annual income of less

than \$45,000. More than half made less than \$35,000.

The differences in pay per course correlated most strongly to the type of institution. Private, nonprofit doctoral institutions paid a median of \$3,800; for-profits paid \$1,560.

While nearly 62 percent of the respondents who worked part time were women, the researchers did not find evidence that gender was a determining factor in pay. Women earned a median of \$2,700 per course, while men reported being paid slightly more, \$2,780.

The vast majority of part-timers, about 70 percent, were in their prime working years, 36 to 65. The majority taught two classes or fewer at the time the survey was taken. And, in contrast to the stereotype of the "freeway flyer"—a faculty member cobbling together a portfolio of courses at multiple campuses—more than three-quarters of the respondents taught at just one campus during the period studied.

The level of degree held by a faculty member also accounted for differences in pay. A faculty member with a master's degree earned a median of \$2,400 per course, while those with a doctorate made \$3,200. Length of service, however, helped very little. A part-time faculty member teaching his or her first class earned a median of \$2,700 per course. Those who have taught more than 30 terms made \$3,000.

"In short," the authors write, "little economic benefit accrues with part-time faculty members' experience in the classroom."

#### Benefits and Support

The coalition's study also examined other areas of working life that have long frustrated adjuncts and their advocates.

Less than one part-time faculty member in four reported receiving health benefits through his or her academic institution.

Opportunities to save for retirement were more plentiful. More than 40 percent of respondents who worked part time said they had access to retirement benefits through their academic employer, with both the faculty member and employer sharing responsibility to pay such benefits.

Those who worked at campuses that were represented by unions generally enjoyed better pay, benefits, and working conditions, the authors write.

The institutions' support for part-time faculty's ability to do their jobs presented another area of frustration. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents reported that they were not paid for work outside the

classroom, such as meeting with students. While nearly 29 percent of respondents were supported in taking teacher-development workshops, less than one adjunct in 10 had access to private office space to meet with students, a shortfall that has lately concerned many experts who see a [direct link](#) between the working conditions of faculty members and the educational outcomes of students.

"The respondents paint a dismal picture, one that clearly demonstrates how little professional commitment and support part-time faculty members receive from their institutions for anything that costs money and is not related to preparing and delivering discrete course materials," the authors write.

The survey results paint an equally dire picture of part-time faculty members' restlessness. About 76 percent of those surveyed said they were either seeking, had recently sought, or intended to seek a full-time, tenure-track position.

The report from the coalition joins other recent efforts to gather data on this sector of the professoriate. Joshua A. Boldt, an adjunct instructor of English in Georgia, has [crowdsourced data](#) from his fellow adjuncts on their wages and working conditions. The Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles also recently expanded its efforts to collect data from part-timers as part of its existing faculty survey.

Much of the data collected by the coalition agrees with other findings, said Linda T. DeAngelo, assistant director for research at the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, which conducts the work at UCLA. But there was one notable difference. Just 47 percent of the 6,700 part-time faculty members responding to UCLA's survey said they had sought or were currently seeking a full-time teaching position. The difference between the two studies, Ms. DeAngelo said, may have been because UCLA's sampled faculty only from four-year institutions.

Advocates for adjuncts hope that these recent sources of data may help to bridge gaps in knowledge left when the federal government stopped conducting the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty in 2004.

What is emerging, however, is not pretty, according to the authors of the coalition's report. "The levels of compensation and support reflect short-sighted employment practices in a labor market where colleges and universities are able to find qualified professionals and pay them significantly lower wages than their credentials and training warrant."



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And when were guns put to the heads of adjuncts to take the jobs? We overproduced academics for years and with online ed growing the demand will only get worse. Maybe they should have taken a harder look at job prospects before getting the degrees. This has been the case for quite a few years now. Other jobs have become obsolete--anyone becoming a travel agent? Used to be a great job. Mortgage broker? NASA engineer?

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These jobs are not obsolete. There is PLENTY of work- my department continues to expand and we continue to hire adjuncts-- this year alone we went from 19 to 26 adjuncts. The problem is that instead of adding full time positions, the ranks of adjuncts continue to swell. Adjuncts are unsupported, under-compensated, and have no academic freedom-- not to mention health insurance, offices, retirement, etc.. The ethical thing to do is to fix the broken system-- and within this system, adjuncts are the least blame-worthy.

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 **blowback** 8 hours ago

I am not sure what is more depressing here: the fact that the report is stating nothing that has not been known about any of this for the last 30 years or more, or that nothing has been done about it in all this time. Does any one think that the plight of adjuncts have not been addressed because there has been a lack of information and that now that the facts are known that higher education is going to be shamed into doing something about it! Our political and public leaders and mass media debate that no matter how much we pay our public school teachers it is never enough---even when in places like NYC senior teachers earn close to \$100,000 with rich pension benefits but no matter how little adjunct professors earn no one is even interested. No parent would tolerate being told by their public schools that their child's teachers will all be replaced by part-time teachers with fewer qualifications so why do the media, parents, and political leaders fail time and time again to pay any attention to the actual state of higher education and the utter exploitation of adjunct faculty for decades.

What all these many studies and reports fail to address is what is going to be done about it? How can we force higher education to change? That has been the problem and will continue to be the problem until the public understands this: there will be no change in this horror story under the current system of higher education in America where there is no oversight and no centralized federal authority to impose change. Universities have continued to exploit their adjunct faculty with impunity because they have no fear---and let us be clear that universities that exploit their adjuncts are just as likely to be exploiting their students and even tenured faculty. These institutions rationalize that the ends justify the means because in their minds it is not the teaching of students that are the ends they have in mind but the survival of the institution by all means. Well, having taught at many institutions over many years there are few if any that I can think of that deserve to survive. Because there is no effective oversight in higher education and no effective means to close down dysfunctional institutions or to remove the charters that allow these institutions to grant college degrees higher education and those who lead it will continue to ignore the calls for reform. What reports like these fail to realize is that higher education based upon its actions for many years and by recent events is nothing less

than an criminal enterprise led by people who lie, cheat, exploit, and more to make sure that the status quo never changes for them. How much more evidence do any of us need to the make clear that higher education cannot police itself and that it can not be trusted to enact any meaningful reform. You can read the headlines just as easily as I can from law schools to Baruch to UVA and more importantly to all the exploitation that goes on semester after semester that never makes it into the news.

We cannot look to our political leaders for any hope when Obama calls time and time again for more students to attend higher education but fails to explain who will be teaching all these additional students. Should we assume that an Harvard lawyer lacks the logic to ask the question or is it that he just does not give a damn or Jill Biden who earned her Ph.D in 2007 teaches at a public community college as a full time but not tenured professor of English and earns close to \$90,000. I wonder how much an adjunct earns in her department. But like others in this White House she rather take the money and not be too concerned about the plight of those left behind. How someone could have taught at the college level for as long as Prof. Biden has and not be mindful of the plight of adjunct professors who teach alongside her is difficult to grasp. Therefore, I am not too hopeful that things will change for the better for any adjunct any time soon. Those who lead higher education will only change when their lives are put in danger in the same way that they have put the lives of every adjunct in danger. As adjuncts we must stop behaving as those who are always in danger and we must become the danger for every university president, every dean, every tenured professor who ignores the plight of adjunct professors and the actual state of higher education in America.....

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vceross 15 minutes ago

We are deep into a major transformation of university culture and organization. The majority of those doing college-level teaching--the face of most universities--are contingent faculty. Since that horse is out of the barn, particularly in a recession, our energy and focus should shift to insuring that contingent faculty are well-qualified, carefully hired, mentored, supervised, and receive good salaries, benefits, office space, a voice in the department and university, job security. We should give serious consideration to the current state of undergraduate education across the university, for the two are inextricably linked.

The more we bury our heads in the sand, the more we participate, by avoidance, the shaping of the university underway.

We should note that it isn't "The Man" who must be identified and destroyed (every time I hear people talk about "the administration" that's what I hear: "The Man") because we \*are\* the man and we are busily identifying and destroying ourselves. Professors man all of the influential posts in universities. Professors are the ones who inhabit administrative positions and make decisions based on the facts and the context. And the facts and context for working with faculty at most universities is that there's nobody home. All most faculty care about is being left alone to do what they want to do; they care about getting sabbaticals, promotions, graduate students; a few care about the department's majors to the extent these are tied to getting the benefits aforementioned. Faculty on the whole are checked out. At most institutions, I'd guess that you could count on the fingers of two hands the number who care about the university as a whole, who understand that the fate of one department is tied to the fate of all, who know that their future is in the hands of those undergraduates they so blithely neglect; much less that we are not merely responsible for ourselves; we should be upholding the institutions of higher education for the health and future of our nation. This is larger than us and we have failed our responsibilities to it.

In the 1980s, we voluntarily began to "professionalize." Quality of mind was displaced by quantity of publications and teaching graduate students (the more the better) was infinitely preferable to teaching undergraduates, whom we happily farmed out to contingents. Bad ideas all, resulting in a bountiful population of unemployed PhDs, very expensive departments with egotistical, alienated faculty, no shared sense of mission or connection to each other or to the university as a whole and, most devastating in the long haul, the production of generations of students who recognize that undergraduate education is a boondoggle, an afterthought, something that supports our bad habits. Those students have gone on to be the businesspeople and parents and taxpayers who are understandably fed up with us.

We know how to rail against whomever we deem the Enemy du jour, but we are at a loss as to how to work together to identify our \*collective\* mission, and how to achieve it before it's too late. We have squandered a century of public goodwill and respect bequeathed to us by those who came before.

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The Chronicle of Higher Education 1255 Twenty-Third St, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20037